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ABSTRACT

This paper is divided into three parts, the first discussing the necessary conditions for an adequate response to Godard and Gorin's film "Vent d'Est." It is suggested that the film demands both cinematic and political sophistication on the part of the viewer and that the audience must accept the flatness, the "deconstruction" of the cinematic image, and be guided by the sound track. Part 2, "A Paradigm: 'The Ecology of Film,'" presents a global paradigm which takes into consideration the whole film process from inception to reception, regardless of the historical period the film is received in. The film as a system is divided into six distinct aspects or subsystems of the film process, and the relationships between these subsystems is elaborated on. The third part, "Categories of Audience Response in Film Viewing," offers a second paradigm in which film response is broken down into the following types: simple, compound, complex self-reflective, and complex self-critical. Each of these types of responses is further subdivided into emotional, intellectual, and a combination of both. It is asserted that there is no such thing as a "pure aesthetic" response. (LL)

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A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO AUDIENCE RESPONSE TO FILM

by Charles Kleinhans and Julia Lesage

Bloomington, Indiana

March, 1973

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INTRODUCTION:

The following paper is divided into three parts, moving from the specific to the general. Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin's "Dziga Vertov" films depend totally on an audience that is both sympathetic politically and also aware of cinematic innovations. Thus audience response to a film such as Vent d'Est must be on a highly complex level (both an ideological and an artistic response) or the film is not received at all. We will examine this complex of factors necessary for an adequate audience response to Vent d'Est as an example to lead into paradigms for the study of audience response in general.

The first paradigm, "The Ecology of Film" locates audience response in the entirety of the film production-distribution process, and has the special advantage of acknowledging the role of history as a determining factor. The second paradigm operates more on a synchronic level. This paradigm is entitled "Categories of Audience Response in Film Viewing," and can cover both the simple response of someone going to the movie for entertainment and the complex response of someone who is critical of the ideology in bourgeois film.

PART ONE: Necessary Factors for an Adequate Response to Vent d'Est.

In a witty section entitled "Education" in the film Vent d'Est, a union official -- dressed in a vest and fancy coat and looking like a plantation owner out of an American film -- and "Miss Althusser" give out books to the inhabitants of the Third World. The voice over calls the union delegate a "revisionist school teacher," collaborating to support "the ideological domination of the bourgeoisie."(1) The following is a section from that scene:

> Union official (in Italian) reading the book title: "How to Read Das Kapital." Good. (Writing a dedication in the book): In friendship and regard for the inhabitants of the Third World! (He hands it to the Indian, then stops him as he is about to go off.) One moment. Start at chapter two.
>
> The Indian puts a piece of meat between the pages and bites into it like a sandwich as he goes off. Camera moves with him showing another table, beside which is piled an assortment of weaponry including a machine-guns and two or three rifles.
>
> Female Voice Over: What did the revisionist schoolteacher just say? He said: "Read Das Kapital." He did not ask you to use it. Use it. He criticizes the defects of the people, but he does not do this from the people's point of view. By treating a comrade like you treat an enemy, he has taken the position of the enemy.

What is being conveyed in this scene? As a matter of fact, this brief moment from Vent d'Est is rather typical of the film's indictment of the French and Italian Old Left. The Union official stands for the Communist Party. He says this explicitly, but any Continental audience would know that the major trade union federations in France (U.S. equivalent: AFL-CIO) are effectively controlled by the CP. In the union bureaucracy, party membership and loyalty is expected and enforced. The directors of the film are drawing on the fact that the PCF has had the total hatred of the student left since the May-June 1968 strike, when the party withdrew support from the strike and had its union bureaucrats get workers back on the job, thus breaking the strike. The book given here is part of the indictment; Louis Althusser, the author, is the leading Marxist theoretician in the PCF, and the book is particularly theoretical, and the directors wittily underlined the authorship by having the Union official take the book from Anna Wiazemsky, playing "Miss Althusser." The Union official's dedication also makes a point, for rather than stressing the spirit of comradeship and solidarity for the people of the Third World, the official stresses friendship and regard for its inhabitants. In Marxist-Leninist vocabulary, the difference is profound.

The Indian's response, a great visual gag, implicitly criticizes the gift: physical needs are more important in a revolution than theoretical documents. As Brecht was fond of saying, "Grub first, then ethics." The contrast is made between the PCF's books and the Third World's guns, while the voice over makes explicit the preceding criticisms. ("Revisionist" is a jargon slur word applied equally to the Soviet Union and the western communist parties by the non-CP left. The basic idea is that the Leninist promise of the Russian Revolution has been betrayed by the CP's accomodation with bourgeois capitalism.) The last two sentences are phrased semantically and syntactically, in ways which identify them as Maoist.

This segment of the film shows several of the film's most striking aspects: its solid basis in a specific historical moment (post-May-June 1968): thus its Maoist response to the PCF, its assertion of armed struggle and the importance of the Third World, visual stereotyping (that the film is partly a Western and the union official wears a fancy western frock coat and tie, we identify him as "revisionist" by his bourgeois clothing), and explicit commentary on the visual/audio track.

However, we wish to begin discussing the film with this example not because it expresses major elements but rather because it implicitly raises a very deep question about the Godard-Gorin Dziga Vertov Group films. "By treating a comrade like you treat an enemy, he has taken the position of the enemy." This Godard-Gorin charge against the PCF is precisely the strongest one which can be levelled against them in a left political critique of their film, for to many it seems that the effect of making such a dense and complicated film, both politically and cinematically, is to treat a comrade (the film viewer) like you treat an enemy.

This in fact was our own first reaction to the film. Who are Godard and Gorin, anyway, that they can make a film that is so cinematically complex that it is totally confusing to the average film viewer, and only partially intelligible to the sophisticated cineaste? And which is so politically complicated that a sympathetic viewer cannot comprehend it on one viewing? We compared Godard and Gorin, with their command of production and distribution resources, compared them to radical American filmmakers such as Newsreel and feminist groups, and concluded that Vent d'Est was self-indulgent to the point of being masturbatory and politically jejeune.

In pragmatic terms of the film's immediate political usefulness as an organizing tool, we still consider the above evaluation valid, but, we've discovered, there is much more to be said, not so much about the film in and of itself, but the film in the context of the issues it raises. Vent d'Est is a remarkable film precisely because it cannot be seen and reacted to except in an explicitly political way. One cannot separate the form from the content, one cannot talk or think about the formal part, the style, without becoming explicitly political (in contrast, many happily discuss Eisenstein's form separated from his politics). Vent d'Est is one of the first films which cannot be coopted, from which the bourgeoisie cannot learn anything except the poverty of their own cinema.

What is the audience response to Vent d'Est? Let us first establish the necessary conditions for there to be any receptive response at all to this "difficult" film. First of all, since the film rejects traditional narrative conventions and refuses to let its audience "inside" it, it is not a Bazinian "window on the world" which most people expect when they go to the cinema. The most likely audience for Vent d'Est is that educated segment of the middle class familiar with and receptive to twentieth century avant-garde art. However, the twentieth century revolutions in poetry (surrealism), the theatre (Brecht, the absurd), the novel (Joyce, Nouveau Roman), music (electronic), painting (abstract expressionism) have not had a parallel in mainstream feature films until Jean-Luc Godard's attacks on and expansion of cinematic form. Thus those people who even go to see Vent d'Est have probably followed Godard's career -- although they might now reject Vent d'Est.

Once having decided to see the film, the audience must submit to Vent d'Est's internal form -- the struggle between sound and image. The images are flat and schematic, a "deconstruction" of the images of bourgeois film. The sound track,

the explanation over the images, provides what explanation there is for the images. It explains how the film is using images that represent an Italian Western, and that the film will "deconstruct" these traditional images and cinematic form in general in order to reflect politically on the real contradictions in cinematic practice, in particular on American cultural imperialism. The film has to be appreciated shot by shot, image by image, as an object of study in its relations with the other images.

Although the statements of the sound track bring out unnoticed articulations, the audience has to fight its desire to see the cinema as something natural or as a story. This film rejects the stance of an innocent or naive film and demands the same of the viewers, that is, to leave their naive days of living inside a film behind. We cannot sit back and absorb this film but must bring our critical faculties into play in order to receive what the film has to say. Vent d'Est is self-critical, as well as being a critique of bourgeois cinema. And as the sound track interprets, identifies, and sometimes even denounces the images, so too the audience must bring its own knowledge of cinematic imagery to the film in order to evaluate Godard's visual irony and critique.

Here, to illustrate this point, is an example from the film. In the early part of the film, the sound track of two female voice-overs tell the history of cinema, particularly revolutionary cinema. The camera shows some of the films major symbolic figures as they are being made up, but the act of making up itself is of significance. A White man playing the Indian streaks thick gobs of brightly colored makeup on his face. In the course of the film, he will represent the oppressed. At the same time, as the young woman gets made up, the voice-over states:

> "The people make history. The films of the Western hemisphere only portray elegant ladies and gentlemen.
>
> The young woman smiles -- a careful rehearsed smile.
>
> "Actors are forced to express the corrupt ideas of the bourgeoisie; under the cover of makeup, they unscrupuously depict the degenerate ways of bourgeois life. All this is done with the excuse that they are expressing fundamental feelings and instincts." (2)

The audience must pick up on the intent of even more complicated uses of the sound track, often witty. In Brechtian fashion, Godard often has an event narrated in third person while the camera remains fixed on one simple image in a long take, a distanciation effect which will hinder identification with the incident. An example of this distanciation which comes from a long, static take is the opening scene, where the camera stays about eight minutes on a couple lying on a field, the woman wearing a flounced white petticoat, their hands chained. Finally the female voice-over reminiscences from the point of view of the manager's family about a strike that took place in her childhood in "the Alcoa Co. near Dodge City," in which the union official sold out the workers. The two female voice-overs give a long history of revolutionary cinema. Similarly in a later scene a male voice over discusses a strike, in the third person, while the image is one of the cavalryman oppressing the Indian, and this story is continued by the female voice-over. In another scene the female voice-overs relate incidents about members of the bourgeoisie who as individuals brutally turned against the working class. This scene starts with a discussion of Suzanne Vaunt, who wrote a letter to Figaro protesting that her husband couldn't paint in the Gare St. Lazare because

of the striking workers, and at this point the audience laughs because of the obvious pun on the visual image, which is an idyllic country scene of a woman dressed in a pink dress and holding a parasol, and a man, the union official, dressed in a fine jacket and bending courteously over her -- just like a Monet painting! Other examples of distanced statements delivered by the voices over are many short statements about historical events, political analysis and prescriptions for political action, and a letter from a striking worker to a friend. In this instance, the accompanying visual image is a static close-up of the young man, now begrimed with blood, seen in profile with a (threatening?) hand, perhaps that of the cavalryman, resting of his shoulder. The voices-over also take up a discussion of people's medicine in China and a critique of "workers' autonomy" in Yugoslavia. In the latter scene, each line of critique on Yugoslavia was read over a red freeze-frame which alternated with a scratched up picture of the production company accompanied by the sound of confused voices. The crew had banded together as a "general assembly" to make this film as a theoretical review of May-June 1968 several months after the riots had happened. However, the general assembly of filmmakers to make Vent d'Est never did function effectively together as a radical finmaking collective -- and Vent d'Est was truly shaped in the editing and sound mix -- done later by Godard and Gorin. The sound track and the mutilated image implicity critique not only the general assembly's role in making the film but also Godard and Gorin's intent in editing it. Both the voice over with its critique of the Yugoslav system of workers' "autonomy" and the scratched up images of the crew work together to distance us from this general assembly -- in whom we would otherwise have a natural interest, and, for French audiences, greatly admire since they were the leaders of the Paris riots.

The fact that two female voices (off) spoke the correct ideas is refreshing to an American radical audience in that it implies an anti-sexist approach among the young French militants from May 1968 who had grouped together in Italy to make this film. However, for a French audience, the fact that women's voices speak the radical explanations may just be more of Godard-Gorin's distancing. The directors, in adding the post-synch sound track, may just have been banking on the absence of women in leadership positions in French radical organizations, so that the sound of women's voices giving the radical rap was an estrangment effect. These voices are not to be accepted as the Truth, but as lessons on an aural blackboard -- to consider but also ammend. Obviously, as in the sections quoted above on cinematic acting, and on the Indian receiving a copy of Althusser, the rhetoric is overblown, slogans and simple prescriptions stated, and parts of the statement repeated ritualistically. Yet, even in this seeming simplicity, there is a constant reference to other texts, to Althusser, to Mao (especially in the parallel construction, simple statements of principle, and imperative sentences), and to Lenin.

In a section where two young people, a man and woman, are filmed on a grassy field, with images interspersed of "Que faire?" (Lenin's What Is To Be Done?) There is a short ironic dialog between the two. Following a high angle close-up of the young man lying around looking up at the sky, they talk of the worker-student alliance, distributing pamphlets at the factory gate, and end with the gag: "Then the students will see that the workers get up early." (repeated) "Then the workers will see that the students get up early."

After another image of "Que-faire?", the young woman is shown wearing a red skirt, and the female voice over gives a commentary which presumably is her speech. This speech assumes the audience's familiarity with What Is To Be Done? and also

Lenin's "Left Wing" Communism: an Infantile Disorder, as well as Mao's distinction between primary and secondary contraditions, and the speech is prescriptive in its sentence structure, ending on repetition (as if one were to follow Lenin exactly -- as in China, the masses expect to follow the writings of Chairman Mao). Even if one generally agrees with this application of Lenin to the French student left, what is to be noticed is the style of political discourse within the film, a style begun by Godard in La Chinoise, which -- with its prescriptions, blunt statements of right and wrong, and ritualistic repetitions -- has a distrancing effect. Which is what the directors want -- the political information is not to be absorbed as natural, but rather received critically, weighted against the image, and thought about in terms of one's own political practice.

Female Voice Over: "What are we going to do? Think left. Read Lenin's text, which is generally used by the revisionists to show those of the left up as agitators. Note that Lenin does not confound a secondary danger with a primary one. Agree with Lenin that the primary danger lies in social democratic treason and the secondary one in leftism, the childish, infantile illness of communism. Note that Lenin spoke for a left-wing worker's movement and not for a left-wing student movement. Start from this, attack leftism whenever and wherever it occurs in Leninist positions ...
Leninist,
Leninist
Leninist, (3)

Much is demanded from the audience in the way they react to the visual images of the film. The images of the woman in the petticoat, the Cavalryman, and the Indian are drawn from American cinema and are intended to be constant critical reference to that cinema. In Vent d'Est, the initial reaction is to be bored with these images, because nothing seems to happen with them. The whole film seems horribly static because Godard and Gorin use every trick they can to keep us out of these visuals, particularly in French left reaction to Bazin's admiration for composition in depth as a "window on the world."

In the treatment of the image in Vent d'Est, the intent is specifically Brechtian. (4) Prohibiting audience identification, fantasy, participation in the image is intended to awaken the audience's critical capacity. What the average filmmaker shows as natural, Godard and Gorin question in order to reveal previously hidden ideological articulations. If we accept any image as "natural", the ideology behind that image then goes unquestioned. (5) Rather than showing images tied together by a narrative, where the narrative imposes a single interpretation on the image, Godard and Gorin present each shot, each fragment, each image as an object of study: in itself, in its interrelation with the other images in the film, in its reference to cinema, and in its reference to all the visual codes of the "real" world (which codes cinema has done a lot to shape).

In many ways the images are "invocations" of established iconic codes, and a comment on these codes. People having make-up put on them in the woods equal bourgeois actors, the man with Van Gogh-like gobs of colored paint smeared on his face is the Indian, who then becomes an image of the guerilla fighter against bourgeois oppression. Towards the end of the film, as the female voice over discusses sexual oppression as the principle secondary contradiction in western society (Labor vs. capital is the primary contradiction), the young woman in the pink bustle dress (seen in the Monet scene) is shown eating from the same plate as the Cavalryman and they talk -- in Italian -- overlapping the words of the

commentary. The woman's lines are about rules of politeness: wash your hands before eating, be polite to your father, etc. The Cavalryman's lines are all vulgar expressions "unfitting for the mouth of a lady." What the image of the woman eating out of the man's plate shows is the bourgeois woman's dependence on the male, similar in intent to the first image of the bourgeois couple lying on the ground with their hands chained together. That there is an alternative is expressed by the entirety of the sound track, with the female voices giving prescriptions for revolution.

Even if one can appreciate what Godard and Gorin are doing with sound/image, Vent d'Est is so constructed that the audience cannot or will not "receive" the film unless they can/or will also deal with the realities of the historical situation in France in 1968 and the film's political reflection on cinema and bourgeois ideology. Representatives of almost all the factions of May-June 1968 gathered in Italy to make Vent d'Est collectively, yet the contradictions between them (which should have come out and been resolved in the discussions before the film was made) were so great, that Godard and Gorin just had to accept this fight and -- after winning it! -- incorporate into the film several scenes which "reflect the subjective incapacity of these comrades at the time of the film to produce the analyses for which they had invoked the necessity." (6)

In one scene, already mentioned, Godard and Gorin scratched up the film stock shot of the general assembly, or film crew. On the one hand they may have scratched the film to represent its materiality at the point of production. Yet the scratched film also represents the failure of collective production.

In another scene, a key scene in which there is an auto-critique of the film, the members of the film company are seen in long shot arguing among themselves. Another shot is shown of two pictures pinned to the door of a wooden shed, one of a Pepsi Cola ad and another of Stalin and Mao, taken from an Italian newspaper. The words "Wanted for Murder" painted around Stalin and Mao. An argument ensues as to whether or not to use Stalin's picture. Then the female voice over asks why there are images of people arguing, confused sounds, and parts of a poster of Stalin and Mao. She goes on to discuss the genesis of the film and says that there would be "a discussion of the making of images and sounds which in the film would depict the same scenes of the general assembly." In this case they were to discuss images of repression.

But why an image of Stalin and Mao together -- plus Wanted for Murder? In fact, many of the members of the group had been associated with one of two youth groups during May 1968. One was a splinter from the Communist Party that broke off before the Chinese Cultural Revolution over the question of Stalin. Another was a youth group that had broke off from an Althusser-oriented socialist group reading Marx's Capital. It formed after the Chinese Cultural Revolution and took as its task the application of Maoist thought specifically to the French political scene. The picture of Stalin is not rejected, but is shown with black bars over his face; however the argument is not resolved. Finally, they equate the question of Stalinism with socialist realism.

Young man: "It's always the same. You are anti-Stalinist, but you still make Stalinist images."

Various shots of the posters and the title, in red and black letters: IT'S NOT A JUST IMAGE, IT'S JUST AN IMAGE.

Female Voice-Over: "Stalinist images. Just consider the problem. There is a positive side to everything that has happened: like having shown that an image in itself is nothing, that there is no image

outside the context of the class struggle. Having shown this with an image of Stalin. Negative aspect: not having found the right image ..."

Repition of title: "It's not a just image, it's just an image," with the word "REPRESSION" overlaid and repeated over and over again. (7)

Godard and Gorin's message -- in the voice over and in the title -- is that the entirety of Vent d'Est is a search for JUST images and sounds, and that if something is "JUST AN IMAGE" it is automatically repressive as an extension of bourgeois (or revisionist) ideological control.

Yet if the audience does learn from the Dziga Vertov films to see all images in terms of class, this would mean the death of bourgeois cinema, as was predicted in Weekend. (8) Brecht had hoped his radical "distanced" theatre would be a call to action, would awaken people to a real (not ideological) understanding of their social relations and show them the "humanness" of society and thus their capacity to change it. Godard and Gorin are, as Brecht was in the theatre, aware of the need to combat bourgeois images in the making of militant films, to find forms and images that correspond to real social relations. "We don't seek new forms," Godard said in an interview in 1970, "but new rapports. Form comes from certain social conditions ... the struggle between contraditions." (9) In this interview he admitted that the Dziga Vertov group was concerned with revolutionary production of films, not distribution, and that the group knew when they formed that "perhaps only two or three companions would see the films," which would be an inevitable situation for a year or two. (10) In practice, Godard and Gorin, who own copies of their films, are accessible to French radicals to whom they like to show and "discuter" their work on a high political level. However, they reject the work of the French filmmakers Chris Marker and Marin Karmitz, who are specifically making films with the proletariat, as being bourgeois in form and insufficient in political analysis. (11)

Many other members of the French left and British and American left reject Godard and Gorin for their "intellectualism." What Godard and Gorin do achieve, for the audience that fits the criteria which we set out in this whole section, is a complete cinematic/visual ideological reeducation, particularly necessary at this point in history. Bourgeois hegemony (or as Godard and Gorin point out, in socialist countries, revisionist hegemony) is even further entrenched in a technological society because media images dominate and inform our own. It is not from the working class that we should expect the necessary ideological reevaluation of media images, since the working class has more urgent material battles to fight. Yet the images must be challenged. This may be the specific task of intellectuals (petit bourgeois) like Godard and Gorin and the sympathetic viewers of Vent d'Est.

Obviously Godard and Gorin must face the political critique of elitism and intellectualism, for they admittedly make films for a very small audience. However, since the socialist revolution in France seems a long way off, Godard and Gorin have taken upon themselves the Brechtian task of opposing bourgeois ideology in both the form and content of feature films. They know that will not make the revolution, but see it as a necessary step particularly with the historical French experience with the CP.

Vent d'Est is not a film for organizing the proletariat, but is important for anyone who really feels involved in ~~either~~ cinema and/or politics. The

Dziga Vertov films set out to and -- if absorbed -- do restructure one's entire way of thinking about film. Rather than being the "Fin du cinéma," (the last title in Weekend) it is the "fin du cinéma bourgeois" and the freedom to shape images about social relations as they are.

FOOTNOTES

(1) All citations to the film taken from the text published by Simon and Schuster in their Modern Film Scripts Series: "Weekend" and "Wind from the East": Two Films by Jean-Luc Godard (New York, 1972). The description of the visuals is precise and extremely useful. Nicholas Fry, Marianne Sinclair and Danielle Adkinson are responsible for the text. For an abbreviated French version of the text of Vent d'Est, see Cahiers du cinéma, #240, (Paris, July-August, 1972). This script is interesting because it divides the lines up into "textes bourgeoisies, minorités, révisionnistes" or "voix révolutionnaire." In future citations, the English text will be referred to as Vent d'Est. Here, page 166.

(2) Vent d'Est, p. 125.

(3) Vent d'Est, p. 133.

(4) See John Willet's translations of Brecht's theoretical writings, Brecht on Theater (New York, 1966), particularly the famous table comparing dramatic and epic theater (p. 37). Just to paraphrase Brecht, and let the reader judge for her/himself the efficacy of a Brechtian analysis applied to a Godard film, here is a paraphrase of Brecht's famous statement in the preface to Mahogonny as applied to Vent d'Est. Vent d'Est rejects plot; it offers the audience a picture of the world rather than something to experience emotionally. It turns the audience into observers and forces them out of participating in a dramatic situation; they are made to face something rather than be involved in it. The film refuses to provide the audience with sensations or work on instinctive feelings. Rather, the audience comes to the recognition of where they are at inside bourgeois ideology as the film provokes critical thought. They are standing outside the action, studying it. There are no personages with fixed characters whose naturalness is taken for granted. Humans are seen as a process, not a fixed point, and they are the object of inquiry -- their social being in the world "outside" being related to the image of human beings in the film. Linear development is rejected and each scene stands for itself, rather than leading inevitably to the next, in the Aristotelian sense. Reason predominates over feeling and social being determines thought.

provokes critical political

(5) [See ~~above~~, added correction at end]

(6) Gerard Leblanc, "Sur trois films du Groupe Dziga Vertov," V H 101, #6, 1972, p. 32 (Paris). This article is an historical analysis of the Dziga Vertov group and its films by the editor of Cinéthique.

(7) Vent d'Est, p. 143.

(8) See Brian Henderson's, "Towards Non-Bourgeois Camera Style," Film Quarterly, 24:2 (Berkeley, Winter 1971-1972), p. 2 ff.

Brian Henderson, "Weekend and History," Socialist Revolution, No. 12 (Vol. 2, No. 6), (San Francisco, November-December, 1972), pp. 57-92.

(9) Godard's interview with Marcel Martin of Cinéma 70, No. 151, (Paris, December, 1970) on "Groupe 'Dziga Vertov'" and subtitled "Jean-Luc Godard parle au nom de ses comarades du groupe: Jean-Pierre Gorin, Gerard Martin, Nathalie Billard, et Armand Marco." In a discussion in Paris this last summer (1972) Gorin told me that he personally had edited Vent d'Est.

(10) Cinéma 70, p. 84.

(11) In the last several years, following both a Maoist and Brechtian line, Cahiers du cinéma and Cinéthique reject films, even if effective for organizing the proletariat, that depend on identification and elicit a simple emotional response.

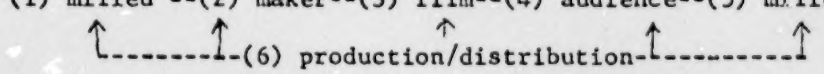
Part Two: A Paradigm: "The Ecology of Film"

To summarize our discussion of audience response to Vent d'Est, we noted that the film demands both cinematic and political sophistication, that the audience must accept the flatness, the "deconstruction" of the cinematic image and be guided by the soundtrack, albeit critically. An historical awareness of the French situation, a knowledge of radical texts, and a willingness to participate in this kind of critique of bourgeois ideology are prerequisite for a complete reception of the film. And the degree to which various members of an audience, or various audiences lack these criteria determine the degree to which they do not/ or will not appreciate the film.

To work our criteria for audience understanding of one film into a larger perspective, we here present a global paradigm which takes into consideration the whole film process from inception to reception, no matter in what historical period the film is received.

The Paradigm "The Ecology of Film" in Brief:

Figure One:



To begin, if we consider film as a system, we can separate six distinct aspects or sub-systems of the film process (Figure One).

One. The (pre-filmic) milieu is taken in the widest sense and includes past history as well as the immediate historical situation. Cinematic tradition is one part of the milieu, as are language, artistic and social conventions, collective and social psychological situations taking place before the film is completed. The milieu is everything which forms an interface with the maker or creator of the film at the time of making (that is until it is no longer under the maker's control).

Two. The maker, in film (as opposed to many visual and literary artists), is almost always not a single individual but a collective entity. It is an accepted shorthand to name the director as the maker, but it almost goes without saying that this is a useful fiction, and that the technical crew, the scriptwriter, the film processor, actors, editors and sound mix engineer, and so forth, are all part of the collective making of a film. Their relative significance in relation to each other, of course, depends on the amount of control they have over the finished product.

Three. The completed film.

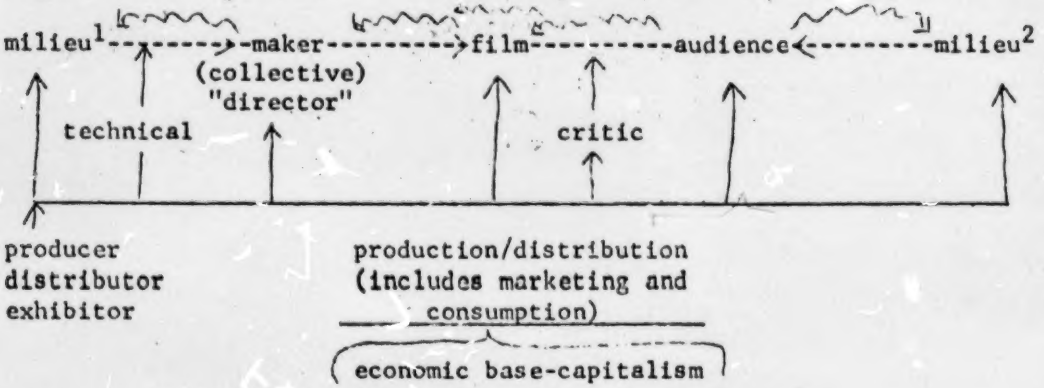
Four. The audience (individual and collective) for the completed film.

Five. The milieu of the audience, which is always to some extent an historically different one from that of the creator. The audience draws upon its milieu in seeing the film, and in turn, acts upon its milieu.

Six. The production/distribution system, which affects all five previous subsystems. Involved in distribution most obviously are producer, distributor, exhibitor, film reviewers, and audience. All of these are influenced by the economic base of the society in which they live. Except where noted, we will be talking about production and distribution in a western capitalist system.[1]

The Paradigm Elaborated:

Figure Two: ~~~ = feedback loop



With this preliminary schematic in mind we can proceed to some elaboration of relationships of the sub-systems, (Figure Two). We take it as axiomatic that each of the six sub-systems has structures, and that these structures can "transfer" from one system to another: that is, homologous structures can be found in each sub-system, and finding one will provide information to understand the homologous structure in another sub-system. We can then, "enter" the system as a whole at any part. A simple example: Hitchcock's films have obsessional traits (e.g. voyeurism) which have their homologues in Hitchcock's consciousness and unconsciousness as well as in the audience's consciousness and unconsciousness. Thus a consideration of The Birds could draw on what we know of Hitchcock (from statements by him, including other films he has made), as well as what we know of audience psychology.[2] Hitchcock knows that voyeurism is part of milieu[1] and milieu[2]. In distribution this structure might be emphasized in advertising which shows eyes, or binoculars, etc.

The maker of a film receives all of milieu[1] and has additionally his or her or their individual psychological and historical situation, and (perhaps) a creative imagination.[3]

In Godard's films, he has always shown an interest in the way cinematic images of the past effect our and his character's behavior. Thus Jean-Paul Belmondo sees images of Bogart in Breathless, and plays out a Bogart-type role. Now Bogart was part of Milieu[1] at the time Godard made the film, and Godard himself had a particular image of Bogart in mind, perhaps shaped by the popular reception of American gangster films in France. In watching Breathless, or other Godard films that draw on the gangster motif, the audience draws on its knowledge of Bogart and gangster films, the same films that Godard saw but seen by the audience under different conditions, their viewing of Bogart perhaps affected by that very French cinematic criticism of the fifties of which Godard was a part. Thus the "structures" of a Bogart characterization are in milieu[1], in Godard's mind, in the film Breathless, in the audience's mind, and in milieu[2]. Godard, like Hitchcock, has always been a self-conscious director; in particular, Godard has the filmic structure consciously play with visual and verbal structures already present in milieu[1].

We should note that the idea of structures existing in each part of our system is a step towards freeing us from regarding only the film, or only the maker-film-audience segment. For example, the structures of language are found

in the structures of perception, for we use words to identify what we see, and these structures are carried from milieu[1] through their actualization in some form of communication to milieu[2].[4] However, the specific situation of the individual creator and audience also plays a determining role, for the audience may not understand the creator's "style".[5] The "creation" of a film takes place over a period of time, so the work can structure the creator as well in this process. For example, Vent d'Est, as so many of Godard's films seem to be, is a film that "got away from" its original intention. It was unrecognizable to the producers after filming, who had given money to produce an Italian western and a film about May-June '68. It would also have been unrecognizable to the "general assembly" of French radicals gathered to film it because of the editing and the added sound track of voices-over, as well as the general assembly itself. Godard and Gorin had to fight to get control of the film and the editing reflects this struggle and their determination to manufacture the final product in a correct political way. Thus there is a feedback from work to maker at the time the film is being made. Once it is completed the maker actually becomes part of the audience and/or part of distribution if he retains any control over the showing of his work. The audience in film can only offer a very weak feedback, all they can choose is whether to buy a ticket or not.

The "individual characteristics" of creator and audience have been studied by psychoanalysis and behavioralist psychology. The structures of the work have been studied by the film theorist. Marxists see that the individual exists yet assert that the individual is a product of social relations, thus diminishing the traditional (Romantic) emphasis on the role of "creation" and placing more emphasis on the milieu.[6] Thus a Marxist analysis of film would reject the idea of the director as auteur and instead emphasize the relation of production and distribution to the artifact--the film, a relationship in which the individual consumer or audience choice in general has very little to do with the form or content of films. Film is basically one-way communication (save for experimentalist attempts to overcome this limit). That is, the receiver cannot respond to the sender and thereby make film a communicative process. For this reason the bulk of communication theory (in Batesonian terms) is not relevent to the analysis of the filmic process.[7]

The Film-Audience Relation:

The film shapes the mind of the audience. For example consider the basic Western love myth, identified by Denis de Rougemont as the Tristan and Iseult story.[8] The key structural elements are a reproduction of the basic oedipal situation (an older and younger male in rivalry for the same woman), which imposes separation of the lovers, which in turn increases their passion. They attempt to live an impossible situation until they are finally and eternally united in love-in-death (Liebestod). Of course, society or events may force the separation rather than the older male, in which case the oedipal scheme withers to irrelevance or must be strained to be included.[9]

Basically, everyone "knows" this pattern or structure. Among American adolescents in love, for example, parental curfews, university housing regulations, high school regulations on overt affectionate behaviour and so forth all create great traumas. Is this duplication of the myth learned from actual experience, from the conflict of self with the real world? Freud's conclusion was that this was the case, that civilization is purchased at the price of the denial of

instant gratification. The repression of adolescent love, then, by external codes or internalized ones such as virginity, comes from civilization itself. The basic western love myth then simply reflects what is.

However, are Goodbye Columbus or Love Story or Romeo and Juliet simply imaginative reflections of history? No, they are more than that. The continuation of the love-myth structure in film and literature is also a socializing convention, a convention continued and reinforced by film and literature. Whatever its origins, the result or effect of courtly love on the concept of love in the West has been to assert that love is no longer physical or social but rather individualistic. God, man, and the social order have nothing to do with the lovers, and their love is finally beyond this world. Love then becomes associated with passion, guilt, idealization, tragedy, and personalism. Most important, these associations are carried in large part through their embodiment in literature. What we have is an ongoing chain in which literature affects audiences (which includes future writers) who go on to reproduce the myth in literature which affects audiences, etc., etc. The love myth goes on and on in this way. Its reification has long been established. Generalization is raised to abstraction and abstraction is reapplied to the concrete. Then the concrete must suffer if it does not match the rule of the absolute.[10]

Feminist filmmakers such as Nelly Kaplan attack the love myth in its representation in cinema precisely because it is an oppressive myth that women have felt they had to live up to. On a lesser level artistically, but more pervasive in influence, are all the cosmetic, clothing, deodorant, liquor, and cigarette advertisements that imply that love or sex is guaranteed with their product. One can attack the use of the myth--that it sells shampoo--or one can attack the myth as oppressive, but very few artistic works attack the entire dominant concept of love.

We can turn to the Marxist critics of film to get a perspective on the class basis of culture, now bourgeois hegemony, and perhaps from them a new historical perspective on cultural evolution. Jean-Luc Godard, following the line of Bertold Brecht, considers both film in its industrial aspect and also the need to create a new non-bourgeois form in order to (create the revolution.) However, Marxist theoreticians of art and culture can and should be submitted to a more rigorous political critique than scholars who reflect the prevailing ideology (who essentially can be criticized mainly for that). Godard, for instance, has created a revolution in film form, yet has little or nothing to do with the class struggle. Like Brecht, Godard rejects "spectacle" and entertainment. He wants to make films that will be like essays, or rather like blackboards -- which, along with discussion, can become a means of teaching and learning for the revolutionary. But for the revolutionary Whom? Those who follow Godard's work and don't reject his post-Weekend films are probably middle class, educated spectators (the intellectual elite) who both appreciate his artistic innovations and share or sympathize with his political views. And even these people are turned off by the imitations of Andy Warhol and the bad politics in a film like Wind-from-the-East, Vent d'Est.

Godard didn't learn enough from Brecht, who worked from the tradition of Volksteater to influence people. Brecht, not Godard, believed in the power of art to affect broad social change, and no other artist before or since has given the audience so much credit and believed so much in their capacity to think and grow. We bring in the example of Brecht in order to hold him up as a measure by which to judge other Marxist commentators on culture, for Brecht was committed to revolution. One may ask whether or not his concept of revolutionary art is

accurate, but at least Brecht placed himself in history and was not trapped in some kind of static analysis. He considered the past milieu and the milieu of the spectator and the desirable milieu to come. He also considered the psychology of the actors and the psychology of the spectators and he demystified what others want to consider as Art. He saw the theater as a vehicle for communication, with the audience feeding back not only to himself and the actors but also to the milieu. For the whole purpose of his epic theater was to awaken people to think about their social structures and the structure of the play, and by means of the play to begin to think how they wanted the structure of their world to change.

In Brecht we do not find reproduced a structure such as the Tristan and Iseult one, which is favorable to the bourgeoise because it indicates that love relationshops are personal and privatistic, but he does treat marriage, for example, in the dramatic monologue "The Jewish Wife" in a specifically social and political context.[10] (The wife is being shipped out of Nazi Germany by her husband, who is remaining, for his own expediency.) The Tristan-Iseult structure in a film is transmitted to receiver's minds, and in turn they base their own behavior on it, thinking of and acting as if love were private property. Marxism provides a meta-commentary on such uses of knowlege.

Bourgeois thought can only end with an analysis of audience response as something like the shock of recognition. However, the work itself shapes the mind of reader, provides the reader with structures which can go beyond immediate class consciousness, as Louis Althusser states in commenting on Brecht:

> Brecht was right: if the theatre's sole object were to be even a 'dialectical' commentary on this eternal self-recognition and non-recognition -- then the spectator would already know the tune, it is his own. If, on the contrary, the theatre's object is to destroy this intangible image, to set in motion the immobile, the eternal sphere of the illusory consciousness's mythical world, then the play is really the development, the production of a new consciousness in the spectator -- incomplete, like any other consciousness, but moved by this incompletion itself, this distance achieved, this inexhaustible work of criticism in action; the play is really the production of a new spectator, an actor who starts where the performance ends, who only starts so as to complete it, but in life.
> (For Marx, p. 151)

Art can have a socializing effect; it does not simply mirror what is, but that it can contribute to what might be. This, of course, does not have to be progressive. In fact it is often not, or is mixed--containing contradictions. One need only refer to Kate Millet's book Sexual Politics for reference to sexism, or the controversy black critics have with William Styron's Confessions of Nat Turner, to demonstrate this. In an era when the socializing function of culture has been so widely described by the left (Mills and Marcuse, to take two very different theorists) and even by the bourgeois state itself (United States government reports on the effects of television violence on children), the bourgeois film critic, with concepts of art as autonomous and a concern for art's "greatness" -- in a vacuum--too often becomes an apologist for the status quo.

In contrast, Godard and Gorin have tried to come to terms with the contradictions in their own society and, cinematically, with the contradictions between

images within the film, and with the contradictions between the film's images and those of the world "outside" (milieu[1]). This cinematic coping with contradictions brings the articulations between film and society to light and provides the audience with new verbal/visual structures with which to go beyond their immediate (bourgeois) class consciousness and re-evaluate that whole visual world they had previously accepted as natural.

Production and Distribution:

The production-distribution system, interacting directly with all five other sub-systems, and technical and critical mediations, is the determinant system within the whole: it has the greatest impact of all sub-systems on the nature of the whole.

Often the production aspect of the system is emphasized, by bourgeois critics because of the documented and notorious nature of production (the Hollywood studios, and their "giant" producers such as Zanuk and Meyer and recently the conglomerates), and by left critics because of the Marxist emphasis on production relations in capitalism.

However, in film, production is organized around distribution (including marketing and consumption). This fact has often been missed. We are not simply talking here about the old distribution domination (e.g. the RKO circuit), but the process which brings production together. In a primary industry like steel, there is obviously an existent market. In a secondary industry like auto or in a utility like electricity or telephone, there is a base market which can be expanded by urging of consumption (total electric living; phone your loved ones, buy the new model). Film is like this but it is completely a consumer-oriented field (entertainment) and must compete not simply with other films, but with other entertainment forms (television, spectator sports, publications, recordings, etc.). Thus the investment of capital is predicated on a more risky market. As a result the market has considerable relative influence (youth films) and considerable influence is attempted on shaping the relative market (c.f., The Last Tango in Paris controversy in which critics were manipulated by the United Artists to shape the film's reception.)

However, the direct input of the consumer on the market is almost nil, since appeals to the "youth" market, etc. are not really constructed with an eye to the reality of social relations among young people but rather continue to reflect bourgeois ideals. Idealist and romantic as it may be (i.e., bourgeois), nevertheless in 1967 Godard's La Chinoise shocked French critics who disclaimed this as a picture of French youth. Yet with amazing historical accuracy, Godard's picture of Maoist youths in Nanterre prefigured the uprisings to begin in Nanterre in the months to come.

Considerable struggle has been waged on the part of independent filmmakers to open alternative circuits because the established distribution agencies reject artistically adventurous films (Jonas Makas and New American Cinema) or politically sensitive one (Newsreel). Speaking to this point, Godard said that revolution is not made at the point of consumption, but rather at the point of production. In addition, he noted that the rare alternative circuits only reach the already "convinced". He would like to see a mass radical diffusion linked to political activity, but such diffusion could be effected only if there were a people's

party (as in China, of course!). Yet, he added ruefully, "We happen to be situated in a country where the revolutionary party is far from existing."[11] Godard and Gorin's problems with distribution not only come from their own political emphasis on production (where making films politically does not mean democratizing the filmmaking process but making films that are politically correct), but also from their uneasy alliances with "hip" distributors such as Grove Press, who pay them far less than other filmmakers of similar status receive, and from their occasional tours to the United States, which they admit they do to make money but during which they also have done little to gain political/cinematic allies.

Technical Mediation:

The influence of such innovations as coated lenses, fast film, and improved lighting on Orson Wells in making Citizen Kane is an established chapter in film history. Not only does technology mediate between the filmmaker and the film, but technology itself, its expansion and its uses, are influenced by the ideology of milieu[1]. The Cahiers du Cinéma and Cinéthique debate of recent years (plus the comments of Jean-Patrick Lebel of the Nouvelle Critique) has dealt with precisely this subject. In forming the Dziga Vertov Group, Godard gave up his love of Cinemascope, Raul Coutard's spectacular photography and supervision of laboratory processes, and original Duhamel musical scores. The group committed itself to filming in 16 mm with just two sound mixes, and films such as Struggles in Italy show how simply a film can be made. Rejecting the notion of technical complexity, Gorin commented recently on their slide show, Letter to Jane, "You can make a film with just one picture."[12]

Critical Mediation:

The reviewer and critic is in a particularly involved situation in our paradigm. While obviously part of the audience, the critic is also part of the distribution system (e.g., Renata Alder was heavily criticized by distributors when she became the New York Times film reviewer after Bosley Crowther because she did not praise foreign films sufficiently; without such praise it was virtually impossible to book the films elsewhere in the States). Whether this attack on Alder changed her reviews is not specifically important here, in any case she was fired/quit after a year. Reviewers also interpose between film and audience, since the audience wants a consumer guide for "spending" their time and money. (The distinction of reviewer and critic is irrelevent to our paradigm since both serve the same function, merely for different-sized readerships; the same with film teachers).

Reviewers in the United States generally pan the Dziga Vertov Group's films, regretting the change in the Godard they had loved -- the Godard of Pierrot le Fou. Of the Establishment critics, only Richard Roud, who hailed Tout va bien at the recent New York Film Festival, has said, "If the old Godard is dead, long live Godard-Gorin." In England, Vent d'Est was not shown until last year, and then in Politkino, an alternate distribution agency for political cinema. Because of going to Politkino to see it and because of several years of French criticism on the Dziga Vertov group, the British critics, film teachers, and cineastes who went to see Vent d'Est in 1972 in London knew pretty much to

expect and generally appreciated the film. However, this had little or no effect on the filmgoing public since Vent d'Est did not reach general British distribution. Perhaps in the United States of America, we filmteachers and critics have just a slight edge. At any time we can rent Vent d'Est in 16 mm for about $125 for a cineclub or a class, and also have the luxury of teaching our students, a captive audience, just what to see.

Implication: Information and Entropy

Taking another look at figure two, we can make an analogy from biological ecology, which draws on systems and information theory to discuss entropy. As developed by biologists, there is a definite relationship between the amount of information in a system and its entropy. By information, here, is meant relationships. The common example is a field and a mature forest. The field has relatively low information,--that is fewer relations, between the plants and animal species--because there are fewer of them. Thus the introduction of a tree species or a herbivarous animal in a field has a much greater impact, for the field has the potential for high entropy. The mature forest, in contrast, has high information (many species, many relationships) and these act as homeostatic mechanisms to check and balance each other. Thus the mature forest shows low entropy.

By analogy, it can be argued that the fewer the relations (the lower the information) in our paradigm, the more significant change in one part can be in affecting the whole. To use an historical example, when film as a system was simpler, innovation was tremendously more important; thus we see the importance of Giffith to Soviet filmmakers, or the quickness with which sound entered, as opposed to the slowness of reception of various widescreen projections in the high-information 1950s.

In terms of Vent d'Est, what Godard and Gorin are doing in this film is as revolutionary as the work of Griffith, but by now the film system is a "high information" one with a tremendous number of established relationships, and their innovations are not absorbed, not even by those of similar political views.

This way of thinking helps us understand why, working in a mass art within a capitalist society, it is so hard to have a truly radical effect anywhere in it for production-distribution constantly "levels" radicalism. For this reason, the American left of the 60's saw Newsreel as an alternative system of distribution. Another example is provided by Kate Millet's film Three Lives. Made and released only in 35 mm initially, it had showings in New York, but very little general impact ~~on anyone~~ (as opposed to critical impact) simply because so few saw this feminist film. Millet had hoped 35 mm distribution would reach more people than just a college audience. Now released in 16 mm it has the potential to reach the audience predisposed to see it by entering a slightly different distribution network, but still this larger audience is primarily a college audience.

Implication: Cinema and Ideology

A full discussion of cinema and ideology including the French debate on this question[13] will have to wait for another occasion; here we can only sketch the

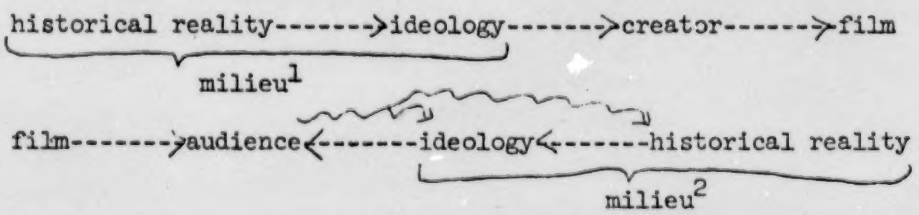
outlines of such an analysis.

Since the paradigm was presented in a diagramatic way, it can all too easily and mistakenly be taken as a static configuration, which is not the case. Milieu[1] has an historical past, but it also has an end, which is the moment of the film's completion as an object. Milieu[2] is not a similar "moment" but in fact an ongoing process. Thus milieu[1] for film x ended one day in 19--; milieu[2] for the same film still exists, and will exist in the future, as long as the film exists as an object (is shown) or as a memory. But clearly the concept of "milieu" creates an enormous category. For our purposes, milieu should be divided into the historical process (i.e., material reality taking place over a period of time---the actual relations of man to nature and men to men), and ideology.

In bourgeois terminology, "ideology" means "world-view". However we will define ideology more concretely, following Louis Althusser, as that which represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real (historical and material) conditions of existence.

> Ideologies are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects, which work fundamentally on men by a process they do not understand. What men express in their ideologies is not their true relation to their conditions of existence, but how they react to their conditions of existence; which presupposes a real relationship and an imaginary relationship.[14]

Ideology and historical reality are related, and the nature of that relationship is that ideology mediates between historical reality and human beings. Because ideology is not an accurate representation of historical reality, there is a contradiction between the two. Any particular film reflects ideology, but this reflection is not total since the film has been shaped by the creator's individuality and selection. We can re-phrase this in terms of our paradigm as follows:



the film, then, is the receiver of and transmitter of ideology (that is, a part of it, as we saw with the love myth).[15] The way in which film reflects and transmits ideology is through both its form and its content. In the area of content, this is fairly easily seen (the love myth); in the case of form, it is more difficult to understand. A good example is the form of bourgeois narrative which carries ideological assumptions (the individual hero and a heroic pattern of action). While this is more easily seen in a film that uses the form in the process of glorifying someone who is objectionable (The Godfather), it can also work in a film of explicitly left political content such as Battle of Algiers, and undercut the film's political effectiveness.

In Pontecorvo's film the Algerian war was treated as a case of individual heroism (and politically futile--the hero is killed). Thus the final uprising and its relation to the narration is not at all clear. Similarly, the film narrates the mechanisms of urban terrorism, but never deals with the tactical

and strategic political questions in the use of terrorism. As a result, the film leads itself to the politically infantile conclusion that individual heroism and urban terrorism in some unexplained (and unexplainable?) way sparks the masses of people to effective revolt. Similarly, in Pontecorvo's next film, Burn, another individual revolutionary hero is posited, and the same analytic problems follow. Additionally, in Burn the political message tends to be undercut because Marlon Brando takes the center of the action as the familiar bourgeois anti-hero. Godard and Gorin have elaborated the need in film to break away from such formal problems inherent in bourgeois forms themselves (that is, the forms reflect bourgeois ideology). This struggle on the part of Godard has been described by Brian Henderson in his discussions of camera style and dramatic form particularly in Weekend. Additionally, the French cinema left has been working over this problem of bourgeois form for several years.[17]

In contrast to the French, who take form as equally important as content in determining the ideological nature of film, we hold that form is less significant than content when the two are conceptually divorced for purposes of examining a film's reflection of ideology or attack on it.[18] The error of Cahiers du cinéma (in particular, the others involved have not engaged the basis of the idea), is in not adequately considering form in its relation to audience response. Their failure can be seen in two ways. (1) On a tactical political level they seldom consider audience. We would argue that Salt of the Earth, with its classic bourgeois form, is demonstrably a more effective film for organizing the proletariat that Vent d'Est, particularly because the former film considers concretely, rather than abstractly, the crucial contradictions of racism and sexism in the working class. (2) On a conceptual level the French also forget the nature of the audience's response. It is the audience's critical viewing (in large part its distance and thereby its ability to respond intellectually) that is crucial for a political response. While film form may initiate such distance, form is, we argue, insufficient on its own to envoke a critical political response without political content or a predisposed audience.

The film-audience relationship is crucial for understanding, for a critical political response can be evoked by a predisposed audience to a thoroughly bourgeois film. A simple example of this point is provided by the re-released 1930's anti-marihuana film, Reefer Madness. It is currently distributed by the National Organization to Reform Marihuana Laws, and is also on the commercial circuit as a camp entertainment. In this case, on the level of content, the audience (adolescent and post-adolescent) specifically laughs at (is critical of) the repeated message that one puff on a joint leads irrevokably to addiction, degeneracy, madness, and death. On the level of form, we can consider another film that evokes a response of critical ridicule, the Curtiz Robin Hood, starring Erroll Flynn. In this case the use of formal devices (camera, editing, and especially narrative with an emphasis on Fairbanks-type daring-do, and super-heroism), evokes laughter and a recognition that the film is "selling" the message of individual heroic leadership. With both Reefer Madness and Robin Hood, the intended audience has changed over a period of time, and the naively believing response of the original audiences has been reversed with the 1970's audience, although both films have remained materially the same as film objects.

Footnotes:

[1]It would be more economically accurate to divide the economics of production and the economics of distribution, however to do so is misleading in as much as distribution affects decisions made prior to production in an on-going film economy. We are especially wary of "purist" separation of production and distribution.

[2]Indeed, we always do so, though it is often an implicit assumption--see part Three. In this example we see that other Hitchcock films are part of milieu[1] and milieu[2]. Similarly, The Birds as part of milieu [1 and 2] is of interest in considering a generically similar film, such as Night of the Living Dead.

[3]We will not engage in this controversy which is now a major debate among behaviorist and non-behaviorist theorists. Noam Chomsky's most recent work seems the most convincing argument for a creative faculty and seems the best current challenge to the mechanism of behaviorists. Aestheticians are totally out of the debate, still fixed in 18th and 19th century concepts of the human mind. Arthur Koestler's The Act of Creation and Morse Peckham's Man's Rage for Chaos are notable exceptions.

[4]Roland Barthes, Elements of Semiology (Boston, 1970). His thesis is that semiology is a branch of linguistics.

[5]For a discussion of "style" vs. "langue" see Barthes' Writing Degree Zero (Boston, 1970).

[6]Ibid. Barthes' book is precisely about the acute limitations facing modern literary "creation".

[7]See Peter Wollens paper distributed by the British Film Institute, "The Concept of Communication(s): Draft for Discussion", 1969. However, we have found Batesonian theory (of human communication as a two way process) provides insights and suggestions. For an introduction, see Paul Watzlawick's Pragmatics of Human Communication (New York, 1967). Bateson's collected articles are in Steps to an Ecology of the Mind (New York, 1972).

[8]Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World.

[9]A typical Freudian attempt to include society as "father": Charles Mauron's chapter on Aristophanes in Psychocritique du genre Comique (Paris, 1964).

[10]Consider Freud on the two-person privatism of love:

> The conflict between civilization and sexuality is caused by the circumstances that sexual love is a relationship between two people, in which a third can only be superfluous or disturbing, whereas civilization is founded on relations between larger groups of persons. When a love relation is at its height no room is left for any interest in the surrounding world; the pair of lovers are sufficient unto themselves . . . . (emphasis added). Civilization and Its Discontents (London, 1949), p. 79.

[10b] Bertold Brecht, The Private Life of the Master Race (N.Y., 1944) in Eric Bentleys translation of Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reichs.

[11] Cinema 70, page 85.

[12] J-P Gorin to the authors in an interview in Paris in July, 1972.

[13] The important texts are:: Louis Althusser, For Marx, Reading "Capital", and Lenin and Philosophy, for the background in Althusser's Marxist epistemology. From its October-November 1969 issue (numbers 216, 217) on Cahiers du Cinéma has continuously discussed this, as has Cinétheque from its first issue. In 1971 Screen began publishing translations of key Cahiers articles, and has announced it will continue to do so. Readers of French should also consult Pierre Macherey, Pour une théorie de la production litteraire, (Paris, 1966) particularly his essay on Lenin's analysis of Tolstoi, PP 125-154, which is the most detailed Althusserian study of art and ideology.

[14] Althusser, quoted in Jean-Luc Comolli and Paul Narboni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism, Cahiers du Cinéma, Numbers 216, 217 (October-November, 1969) and translated in Screen, in 1971.

[15] For purposes of conciseness we are fudging on the question of the relation of ideology to the creator. Bertold Brecht, Ho Chi Minh, and Mao Tse-Tung were able to assimilate that ideology which was "alien" to their class origins and to write imaginative literature incorporating it. So too Godard and Gorin, although bourgeois, should be able to produce revolutionary art. We are also putting aside here the relation to production-distribution. To those familiar with Althusser's terminology we would say that film is always overdetermined in relation to base, a point he does not clearly make regarding art. A film is not merely determined by potential class consciousness and thus to be studied by causally and linearly related influences, but a film is over-determined and has within it the contradictions found in the social class and historical situation from which it emerges. If we approach a film in this way, we can see that understanding the film in depth means not only understanding the writer in depth and his or her social group and class, but also the work's relations to other classes and its specific historical situation. We find Althusser wrong in not sufficiently recognizing art as receiver of and transmitter and shaper of ideology.

[16] Brian Henderson "Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style," Film Quarterly, 24:2 (Winter 1970-71), and "Weekend and History," Socialist Revolution, no. 12 (Vol. 2, No. 6; November-December 1972).

[17] See above, Note 13.

[18] For a discussion of two recent films which Cahiers and Cinéthique have used to argue this point see Julia Lesage's "Coup Pour Coup and Tout va bien: French Political Film in Context," Cineaste, (Fall, 1973).

Part Three: Categories of Audience Response in Film Viewing

Audience Response and Film Critcism:

Discussions of film, from conversations and journalistic reviews to deeply analytic studies of individual films or portions of a film almost always involve assumptions--implicit or explicit--about audience response. Even the most formalistic or stylistic analysis, which assumes it is operating only on an "aesthetic" level, or which assumes it is "purely descriptive" begins to make implicit concepts of audience response part of its analysis once it moves to any degree of generalization. To take a simple example, to label a film, or film segment, "comic" is to make an assumption about its effect on the audience.

Recently two currents have brought the question of audience response to the center of film discussion. One current has been from film-makers and films, particularly Jean-Luc Godard and other didactic film-makers plus the experimentalists such as the New American Cinema. Their impact in the late '60s has been to cause a serious re-examination of film criticism, particularly on the Continent, and now in England and the Americas, with critics turning to structuralism, semiology, marxism, and other new or previously unconsidered methodologies to deal with films which seem to have streached the dominant conceptions of what makes a film (narrative, organic use of sound and image, etc.).

The second influence on this question of audience response is the fact that the nature of the film audience has been drastically changed by changing social forces (obviously an influence on Godard, too). Whereas in the early 60's social commentators such as Daniel Bell could proclaim an "end to ideology" in the advanced capitalist countries, the social-political upheaval within the presumably homogeneous societies of the West, and militant nationalism in the Third World, demonstrated that deep power and ideological conflicts remained in society, which are also expressed in social products such as film.

Clearly the two previous paragraphs could each deserve a monograph, but we wish to pose them as useful generalizations (not truisms) for the moment, in order to provide a simple background for a consideration of audience response, and the closely related question of distance. Our aim is to present a useful paradigm for further discussion of audience response, since it seems more and more apparent from film criticism, and journalistic reviews, and post-viewing comments (and sometimes during viewing) that we do not have a practical vocabulary to discuss what we mean in this area.

To some extent the failure to develop such a critical apparatus can be laid to the long reign of personalistic and impressionistic film criticism which made no pretensions to being scientific or rational. It was, rather proudly, literary. Yet the understandable reaction to that trend focused either on internal film history or an internal aesthetic approach of formalism--"film as art", or "film as film". Both the historic and aesthetic approach have revealed themselves as having serious drawbacks, which have been most evident in the critics last step, evaluation. Film students who have become quite used to raising eyebrows or smirking at the dated and/or cranky evaluations of impressionistic critics of the past, have now begun to question the actual worth of films which are historically important for technical or other non-aesthetic reasons. This is most frequently expressed in the questioning of and demand for relevence. The usual response to

this questioning has been that of the turtle-withdrawal. And they have also begun to question the basis of evaluation by aesthetic critics. (Two simple examples are the amusement Americans feel at finding French film intellectuals enamoured of Jerry Lewis, and British critics adoring of Douglas Sirk and Nicholas Ray.)

Yet the need for a critical consideration of audience response becomes increasingly more obvious. Many recent films have deliberately catered to specific audiences; such as disenchanted youth (The Graduate and Easy Rider), and blacks (Shaft). As film companies have discovered that the film audience is no longer the "everyone" of the '30s and '40s, they have begun to find many audiences. Yet this commercially motivated pluralism does not run as fast as the audience, as for example feminists hiss at gross sexism in movies, and dissect it in reviews and articles. What teacher of film history can show Birth of a Nation even to an all-white audience, without a preamble about Griffith's racism? Films too are becoming more sophisticated in dealing with their own conventions. Since High Noon, the western, once thought to be a completely formulaic genre, has developed beyond the psychological western into the anti-western (Doc) and the logical extension of violence (Sergio Leone's films) and, according to some, even beyond its own limits to becoming something completely different (El Topo) for which old concepts cannot be streached. Clearly with such films we can no longer speak of audience response, (or not speak of it as when normative assumptions are generally shared) in the simple way we can (or previously could) with a John Ford western.

Actually, the matter of audience response is not a new question in the field of aesthetics, though it has been rather neglected. Both Plato and Aristotle, as fathers of western aesthetics, were engaged with the question. Indeed, for Aristotle it became a cornerstone of his definition of tragedy when he stated serious drama had a cathartic effect. More usually in modern philosophy, the question has been phrased in terms of the relation of subject and object. In the case of film, the projected image and sound are the object, and the viewer/listener is the subject. Our common vocabulary reflects this concept: "objective" and "subjective".

Since a discussion of audience response cannot consider the subject alone, but must include the object, that is the film as stimulus for the response in the subject, we must talk of two different orders or categories simultaneously when we speak of the subject/object relationship. One applies to the audience and the other to the film. This complicates matters, and is often the source of descriptive confusion. For example, the statement "that film was complex (or sophisticated, or multi-levelled, or racist, or sexist, etc.)" is often meant to describe two different orders or even both of them. It can mean "that film, as an object in and of itself, is complex" or it can mean "my response to that film was complex" or, as is often the case, it can assume that "that film in and of itself was complex as evidenced by my reaction to it". It is semantically difficult to say that a film object is sexist or racist per se, yet only the perversely obtuse would not understand the statement, "Birth of a Nation is a racist movie".

Clearly there are dangers in making the initial statement and meaning the last, for clarity is reduced, as is most obvious when someone else responds negatively, "No, that film was simple" (meaning, "That film in and of itself was simple as evidenced by my reaction to it"). At this point most film criticism simply becomes a rhetorical battle attempting persuasion or maximum intimidation of the opponent. For this reason most film criticism is remarkably well-written

from the point of view of argumentation, but suffers from a nearly total non-concern with logic or fidelity to the initial points.

That sounds like a put-down of the first order, and we mean it as such, but we think it must also be understood as reflecting what few film aestheticians have dared to say.... that in fact we may never be able to separate subject and object in film study, that we may be always subjective, and stuck with our own Heisenberg uncertainty principle that decrees we can, always being contaminated subjects with our own prejudices, histories, visual and aesthetic education, and so forth never attain a true objectivity, but only make approximations and clearly delineate who we are to others before commencing our "reading" of a film text. The critic and the audience must always be subjective, for that is their role. But the fact that we are subjective does not preclude our analyzing the process which contains our subjectivity. In Bateson's terms, film theory is not criticism, but meta-criticism.

Paradigm: Categories of Audience Response in Film Viewing(see next page)

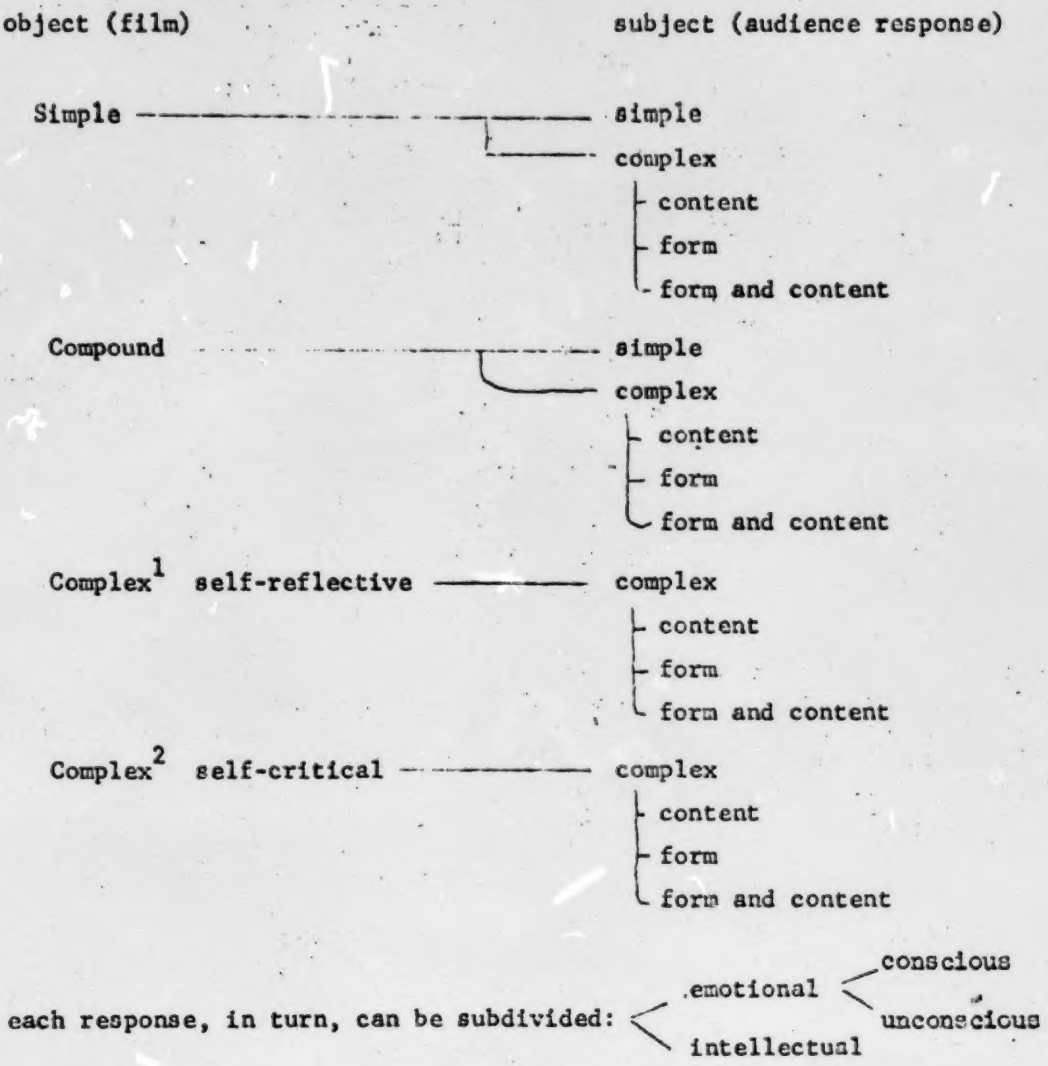
To start with we have two things, the film and the response. Let us start with the elementary division of both into simple and complex (or naive and sophisticated, if you prefer). (Bear with the following gross generalization for a bit, it is to make a point). A "simple" film, we will say presents a rather clear content in a rather clear form. For an example we will take the stereotyped Western. The content is a basic romance/melodrama, the form is elementary film narrative. Now a simple response would be to simply and easily assimilate the content through the form... to "believe" the story and the attitudes presented (e.g. good triumphs over evil; Caucasion intruders are superior to the native American Indians). Such a simple film, though, may also receive a complex response either through the content not being assimilated (resentement of the racism) or the form being irritating or both.[1] We will take a micro example from the Western: that if the falls off of horses are "fakey" they are noticed and momentarily disturb narrative flow.[2]

Before moving on to the complex film, let us construct an intermediate film, or a variant on the simple film. This would be the film that we can call "compound"--that is it relies on what one's knowledge of simple films are and plays off of their conventions. An example could be the psychological Western (High Noon) or more clearly, the anti-Western. The anti-Western attacks the cherished myths of the stereotyped Western to make its point: the marshall is a drunk/dope addict/corrupt/sexually deviant or depraved, etc. Again we can have a simple response: to accept the message (that no one is perfect) or, we can have a complex response, seeing the message but comparing it with the old convention and then viewing it critically and emerging with a more sophisticated message (that the old myth was wrong, indeed that it was probably socially destructive). This can easily be referred by the viewer to a larger context, as is frequently the case with the compound war movie. Set in WW I (Johny Got His Gun) or WW II (Catch-22) or Korea (M*A*S*H)or the Cold War (Dr. Strangelove), the film seems to be a comment on current war as well. This has only considered content. A film can also follow the basic content of a genre and play off the usual form (Bonnie and Clyde) and be compound and elicit a simple response (It's pretty) or a complex one (See the mountainous criticism of it by journalist reviewers particularly on the "aesthetics" of violence). Or a compound film can play with both form and content, it may even be a compound hybrid, such as Godard's Alphaville, a science fiction-ganster-philosophical film playing with changes on both form and content.

Paradigm: Categories of Audience Response in Film Viewing

What we have said about subjectism was meant as a caveat before presenting and developing the following paradigm:

Figure 3



At last then we can get to the complex film, in which the film itself forces either self-reflection on itself as film, (much as poetry does with Byronic irony or the theatre did with Pirandello forcing the audience to see that the play is a play). Our example of this type of film will be Jean-Marie Straub's Othon. Or in a more Brechtian vein the film can be not merely self-reflective but self-critical in a larger context...making explicit its ideological basis to the audience. This is what Godard-Gorin are into. In Vent d'Est the visual track shows a "scene" from a western, yet it is compound because it is obviously fake (one character is reading a book) and it is complex because the sound track is commenting on westerns. Thus with the self-reflective film or self-critical film the idea of a simple or naive response is simply impossible. In fact this is the great formal achievement of Straub and Godard: to have discovered a method of totally inhibiting simple response.

We are still not done with our categories. Thus far we have postulated a simple response, or a complex response, of three types (to form, to content, and to form and content), each of these responses can be further subdivided. First we can divide them as being either emotional or intellectual, or both. This is a somewhat artificial division, but useful for conceptual purposes. We would argue that an audience always has an emotional and intellectual response to a film. The emotional response can be subdivided into the unconscious and the conscious. In the intellectual category of response, it should be apparent from our earlier discussion that such a response is contaminated by ideology, and is historical in nature. There is no such thing as a "pure aesthetic" response as posited by Kantian idealism. Much more can be said about emotional and intellectual response, but that discussion will be postponed for our purposes in this essay.

Implications of the Paradigm: Convention

The film-maker takes one set of signs and signals which are usually thought of as film conventions, and these are arranged in the film, thereby establishing a code, This code, in turn, is recognized by the audience as equivalent to or homologous with, the signs and signals of a different code. This second code is that one which is their own perception of the world, the prevailing semantic code.

Now, by changing or manipulating either code from the accepted norm, a distortion is produced--the appearance of things not being manipulated is called into question.

If the film code is obviously changed, we have self-reflective film: film commenting on its own nature as film. A simple example is provided by L'année dernière à Marienbad in its initial release in the early 60's in America. With disruppted narrative, constant change of costume, and montage-type editing, the film was not easily comprehensible by foreign film audiences (mostly college and college educated) since they were unfamiliar with the technique. They didn't know the conventions the film was using. Those who did understand the film enjoyed the cinematic "tricks" and thus had a complex response. However, the film no longer has the same effect, in large part due to the visual education of television after the mid-60's, which increasingly used montage editing in commercials (soft drink commercials are particularly notable here, also Alka-Selzer and Benson and Hedges commercials) which visually educated millions to a new convention. That is, the prevailing semantic code changed and caught up with

the original filmic code. Our response to an Alka Seltzer commercial is rarely complex, as it was with Marienbad. Semantic codes in the audience are always changing, and as a result, when a filmic code is no longer part of one's current semantic baggage, it seems a cliche when seen. (Most obviously, what director would now show the passage of time with the blowing leaves of a calendar?)

Godard surprised the world with the jump cuts in Breathless, but by now they have become sufficiently natural to go unnoticed, which is one of Godard's own points about the devastating effects on our minds for us to accept images as "natural" and not subject to deliberate human change. His first film Breathless made audiences aware of editing and thus elicited a complex response.

Implications of the Paradigm: The Avant-Garde

A related problem is that of the nature of avant-garde art. It is often forgotten that the concept and function of the avant-garde is linked to the development of bourgeois capitalism, that it is primarily a merchantile and ideological phenomenon, and only secondarily an artistic one. Cinema in and of itself does not need avant-gardes, but society does. The first requisite of the avant-garde is that it be new, that it produce scandal, confusion, or sensation. The reason is simple: that which is immediately accessible to the mass audience cannot be an avant-garde. It is the cogniscenti who declare something "avant-garde". In the visual arts this is easily seen: "avant-gardes" are declared by a fairly incestuous group of private collectors, (who buy the works), dealers (who retail the works), and critics and art publications (who mediate the marketing process). One of the notable features of pop art, for example, was that it rapidly passed into popular acceptance. Warhol's Brillo boxes and Campbell's soup cans could be quickly "read" by the masses and mechanical reproductions quickly flooded the new boutique markets with soup-can beverage glasses, wastebaskets, etc. In contrast, abstract expressionism and more recently op art, have had more traditional and longer existences as avant-gardes precisely because throwing paint on a canvas was not the main point of a Jackson Pollock, and the combination of perceptual geometry and color was essential to op, a point missed by those who attempted mass imitations.

In cinema the situation is similar. The avant-garde must be accessible to a limited number of viewers or it fails as avant-garde. Ken Russell's visuals are a good example: he works within the general limits of Anglo-American mass graphic art and design...his visuals are often "fresh" and "new" but not "advanced". For the avant-garde, the present is merely a passage to the future, and correlative to this, it affirms that it can predict the future. Avant-gardes, such as the New American Cinema are political in their behavior, but with bad politics. They tend to a combative stance with other areas of cinema, past or present, rather than being outward looking and attacking in the direction of society. Avant-garde movements, then, tend to spiral inward, and reinforce the academic idea of cinema as a realm separate from everday life. Avant-gardes need their coterie of consumers, but also their coteries of explainers, critics and reviewers.

Othon as a self-reflective film:

Straub's Othon[3] is basically about aesthetic distance. Distance is created in it in several ways. The film is a transfer from one medium to another. Acutally we have three "Othon's": as a literary text, as a theatrical play (even though it has never been performed since 1708), and as a film. The setting is one of the means of creating distance. The story is set in ancient Rome, yet was written not as an accurate period piece, but as a French neo-classic tragedy and is thus ancient Rome viewed through Corneille's mind. We can call this second Rome, the stage Rome. Straub takes it one step further by filming in modern Rome, with the sight and sound of auto traffic intruding from time to time, and shooting with the present day weathering and ruin of older buildings (some ancient, some Renaissance or post-Renaissance).

Distance is also created by different styles of acting, and language. Of course ancient Romans spoke Latin and Corneille wrote in classical French (in verse). Using Italian actors, Straub emphasizes or draws attention to all this by having them speak the French with distinctly noticeable accents. Since French poetry functions on syllable rather than metric beat, and an Italian speaker of French tends to introduce a certain beat or sing-song, due to the structural characteristics of Italian, the effect is, depending upon the actors facility with a French accent, another distancing. When subtitles are added for an English or German audience the effect is compounded. Related to this is acting style. The dominant style is the very rapidly spoken, running-on of the French, often missing the caesuras and rhymes that give neo-classic French verse a subjectively felt "majesty". Straub's reason for this might be quite simply to squeeze the text into x minutes of film, which is a directorial comment on Corneille's "Othon" and its existence as a cultural artifact. Straub does not attempt "fidelity" to traditon (exemplified, say, in a Comédie Français performance), but he does not edit the text...by stressing literal fidelity to the expense of the spirit, he comments on both. While the delivery of some lines is very rapid and done with virtually no affect (non-verbal expression) by the actor or actress, other actors and actresses are given free rein to give facial and body interpretation. Again the result is an implicit commentary developed through contrast. Thus neo-classic dramatic "rules", such as all the action taking place in an unspecific antechamber are broken, (as is the usual prohibition on characters sitting) with the location shifting (to unspecific but outdoor sets). Finally, the camera itself at times seems stuck on extremely long frame situations, yet breaks at one point to move along with (behind) two characters taking a long walk. There seems no logic to the use of the camera, for it is not constant.

What is Othon about then? Basically, we think it is a film about film as a medium, the familiar art-commenting-on-itself syndrome of the 20th Centruy. Yet it is not simply self-reflective on itself. The effect is to comment on the transfer of material from one medium to another: actual event, historically rendered event, creative dramatic text, performance of that text, pro-filmic (in front of the camera) performance, and film. In this it raises the question of the use of Corneille, the function of literature and film, the meaning of artistic meaning, the uses of history and of classics. Corneille's great theme in all his works is the conflict of individual love and state power, usually detailed with marriage or proposed marriage as mediator of the two. Othon is no exception, and the tradegy is that individual fulfillment is never attainable, much like Freud's thesis in Civilization and its Discontents, that progress is purchased at the price of denying immediate gratification. In this sense a more philosophic

meaning can be derived from Straub's Othon and it can be fitted into the nouveau roman and other artistic currents of post WW II French thought: that the film is about the absence of people, about their non-participation in life.

We have chosen Othon as an example of the self-reflective complex film because it has been seen by the French cinematic left as an explicitly political film in form. Currently it is held up in France as an example of the political "deconstruction" that progressive film should emulate. We do not see Othon in that way. We believe there are three main reasons the French can see Othon as a "deconstructed" film, a self-critical film, while we can only see it as a self-reflective film (and within the limits of bourgeois ideology).

(1) In France the educational and cultural system has an extreme veneration of the "classics" such as Corneille. Thus an attack on the sacredness of a classic text is a liberating and political act in France. The Anglo-American tradition, in contrast, has not venerated its "masters" in the same way. Literary burlesque is an old tradition in our culture, and Shakespeare, to take a parallel figure to Corneille, has been altered all along. The 18th Century wrote "happy" endings for the tragedies, the Victorian age Bowlderized the Bard, and production has always been free (e.g., Orson Wells, Peter Brook, Charles Marowitz) and only mildly controversial.

(2) In drawing on two different philosophies and methodologies the French cinematic left has introduced an unnoticed contradiction. On the one hand, Cahiers in particular is heavily indebted to Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, neither of whom are Marxists. On the other hand, the Cahiers editors consider themselves Marxists with a heavy debt to Althusser. The two are not harmoniously reconcilable. This odd amalgam has allowed them to detach form from content for conceptual purposes, and also for active criticism of films.

(3) The French cinematic left seems unable to separate a film as an object from its creator's intentions and from its critical reception in order to see it for what it is. This is particularly evident in the essay by Jean Narboni, "La vicariance due pouvoir" (Cahiers du cinéma, 224), which established Othon as a truly radical, self-critical film. In reading the article one is struck at how Narboni takes Straub's reputation as a political film-maker, and Straub's statements in interviews in this and the preceeding issue of Cahiers on Othon as sufficient proof that the film is materialist and radically goes beyond bourgeois ideology. Additionally, Narboni seems motivated to defend Othon in large measure because it was attacked as petty-bourgeois avant-gardism by PCF intellectuals. Interestingly enough, when Cinéthique published a double issue (9/10) on their collective theoretical basis, they heavily attacked Barthes, yet still held to Othon as a self-critical film, without apparently noticing the contradiction, since Narboni's article relies heavily on Barthes' ideas, explicitly.

A similar confusion is evidence in Cahiers editor Jean-Louis Comolli's co-authored study of recent American jazz, Free Jazz/Black Power. Comolli manages to compare the growth of the political Black Power movement with the development of "Free Jazz" (as exemplified by John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Archie Shepp, etc.) and concludes that the music is the direct artistic expression of the political movement. His only substantive support are quotes from Shepp about Black liberation, and titles of instrumental music such as "Liberation" and "For Malcolm X."

It is easy enough to ridicule such an effort, besides the methodological flaws, by pointing out that the audience for such music is overwhelmingly white, that the overwhelming majority of Black Americans are completely unfamiliar with it and most of the remainder do not like it. However there is another element of Comolli's naivite which is interesting in its relation to Cahiers analysis of form. Obviously instrumental music is all form and no content. If one could find ideology in a work of pure form, then one could find ideology in a work of both form and content, such as film, in separating the form. And then one could assert, as Comolli and Narboni do, that there is a category of films in which "the content is not explicitly political, but in some way becomes so through the criticism practiced on it through its form." (Their examples are Mediterranée, The Bellboy, and Persona.)[4] And then one could make such an assertion with some basis. Unfortunately, they have only made the claim, and never demonstrated it, neither in music or in film. In the absence of any concrete thought on their part, we can only be skeptical of their assertion.

Vent d'Est as a self-critical film

Out initial discussion of Vent d'Est considered it as a self-critical film. Here we can re-examine the film in the terms of our paradigm of audience response. Vent d'Est is a self-critical film in its entirity, not merely in the fact that around the middle of the film we see the actors and film crew engaged in a criticism/self-criticism session.

In the segment we will use as an example, the visual track shows the cavalryman riding his horse, dragging the Indian along by means of a rope around the Indian's neck. (The sequence runs from the title that ends with "The A Theory" to the sequence with Glauber Rocha.)[5] The initial shot is a low angle one of trees against a sky. This shot is Godard motif, recurring in many of his films, particularly those shot in color. In the 2 or 3 Things I Know About Her and Weekend period the shot seems to be used ironically, contrasting the romantic associations of nature with the anti-romantic action and dialogue, and interrupting Godard's usual eye-level horizontal camera work which dominates the film with a low angle dramatization of the image. In Vent d'Est Godard goes beyond irony and has a voice over directly comment on the image. "Hollywood shows this in the form of cinema, as something wonderful, dreamlike, for which you have to pay admission. But this dream is also a weapon in Hollywood's hands." The shot changes to the cavalryman and Indian. By this point in the film we know that the cavalryman is not a cavalryman, the Indian is not an Indian: both are actors. Thus our response cannot be simple in any way, but emphatically is "this is an image which is not a standard western image, but a comment on that standard image." The voice over continues, explicitly making the point. "Hollywood makes you believe that this movie Indian is more real than an Indian and that the extra on horseback is more real than a Union soldier." The same shot is then repeated, with the voice over commenting on the disguise of reality inherent in such an image. Because visual scene looks rehearsed, and the Indian's costume vaguely suggests, but does not adequately imitate, the usual Hollywood Indian costume, the visual track grates against itself. This functions like the familiar Godardian ketchup or paint representing blood (and always looking exactly like ketchup or paint). The visual track has its own distancing, which is then emphasized by the voice over. The two characters/actors are then seen from a different angle, with the cavalryman shouting (in Italian), "I am General Motor!"

Here we have not simply the familiar Godardian punning, as in say, 2 or 3 Things, where the American war correspondant announces he is "John Bogus." Rather the punning is linked to the depiction of American imperialism, and General Motors is part of it. In Marxist terms, the state (here the military) is the apparatus of the economic system (General Motors is capitalism and imperialism).

The camera then tilts upward and surveys the trees and sky again, but seeing it this time our response includes the knowledge that this is a comment on idealism in cinematic images. We are not "drawn in" to admire nature, but distanced from, and critical of, the image we are presented with as the voice over continues that Soviet film repeats the same images (and thereby in form the same ideology) as Hollywood. (Two examples we can think of would be the sentimentality and lyricism of The Cranes Are Flying and Ballad of a Young Soldier). The voice over criticizes "progressive cinema" of the Third World on the same basis.

> But is the progressive cinema examining this relationship (of images and sounds) seriously? Where does this relationship come from? How does it work? From whom? For whom? And against whom?

The shot is then repeated, and the voice over elaborates on the same topic. A third shot of the cavalryman and Indian is shown, and then repeated, as the voice over criticizes the avant-garde and underground cinema: "A cinema without taboos, except against the class struggle."

This portion of Vent d'Est, like all of the film, is too dense for comprehension on first viewing, or even second viewing. The criticism of Soviet and underground film, however valid, is not convincing. But the criticism of Hollywood, that is the bourgeois cinema, is devestating, particularly with the visuals as well as the voice over making the point. After seeing this sequence and understanding it (and that takes several viewings, we feel), one cannot (or at least we have found we cannot) ever have the same kind of empathetic response to a Hollywood image as one (we) had before. Vent d'Est has functioned as a political education of our experience of films to inhibit naive response not only to itself, but to other films as well. That clearly is not all that Godard and Gorin were trying to do with this film, but to have accomplished that much is amazing. In this sense Vent d'Est (and/or the other Dziga Vertov group films) is an epistomological break with all previous cinema.

Footnotes

[1]Even with Straub's Othon, a deliberate attempt to produce a totally irritating (or distancing) form, audiences find themselves, if they can endure, draw in to "learning" the form...that is it is hard to conceive of a film that is constantly and repeatedly psychologically irritating on the level of form, though perhaps constant physiological irritation is possible since apparently certain cycles of stroboscopic light elicit discomfiting physiological response.

[2]Yet even to get this far in dividing things up has already created problems: "who really believes a western? or in what way do we believe it, or does our hypothetical simple viewer believe it?) And how did we decide that a western was simple to begin with?" These are completely valid questions... for not stopping to answer them here we can only confess that what we are attempting is

at such a primitive and textbook level because no one has ever systematically dealt with it before that we are reduced to such inanimities to make progress. (For consolation, though, consider that film criticism faces these problems but is only decades old, yet the drama analysis has never done better in facing them and is centuries old.)

[3]Othon is the accepted short title. Straub's title is Les Yeux ne veulent pas en tout temps se fermer, ou Peut-être qu'un jour Rome se permettra de choisir à son tour.

[4]"Cinema/Ideology/Criticism", Cahiers 216, 217. Translated in Screen, 1971.

[5]Vent d'Est, pp. 162-4.

Footnote 5, page 9

In particular, Jean-Louis Comolli of Cahiers du cinéma (nos. 229, 230, 231) has written a series of long theoretical articles demonstrating the bourgeois ideology behind the "naturalness" of photography and especially behind deep-focus cinematography.